

VZCZCXRO1682
RR RUEHMA RUEHPA
DE RUEHNM #0871/01 3101745
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 061745Z NOV 09
FM AMEMBASSY NIAMEY
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 5440
INFO RUEHDS/AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA 1695
RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
RHMFISS/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEHLMC/MCC WASHDC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 NIAMEY 000871

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SUBJECT: Niger: Meeting with High Commissioner for the Restoration of Peace

Ref: a) Niamey 821 b) Niamey 864 (NOTAL)

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11. (SBU) Summary: On November 5, Embassy Political Officer and Specialist met with the Government of Niger (GON) High Commissioner for the Restoration of Peace (HCRP), Mohamed Anacko. The Commissioner spoke about the ongoing peace process, landmine removal, fears of Al-Qaeda in the region, and efforts by the Government of Niger (GON) to bring communities in the north together. He opined that the State of Alert is unlikely to be lifted in the North in the near term. End Summary.

GON Services Lack Expertise to Extract Mines

12. (SBU) Anacko stated that despite a formal agreement between President Tandja and rebels on the laying down of arms (ref a), areas of concern remain. In the vast lands in the north, landmines remain that need to be located and destroyed. He reported that rebels have provided general parameters of mine locations, but can't give exact information. Anacko emphasized that the GON will need outside expertise, notably development partners, to assist with landmine extraction. He expressed anger about bandits in the region engaged in illicit activities that continue to create problems in the North. He said drug trafficking has become a major GON concern and blamed traffickers for the slow progress in returning to normalcy in the North.

Maintaining Peace is GON's Primary Goal

13. (U) Anacko stated the GON would like to hold a peace forum in Arlit, a northwestern city of Niger. He acknowledged that the GON needs to make a better effort to sensitize the people in the northern areas about the danger of landmines and explain the ongoing peace process. He stated belief that many people remain fearful and are not convinced that the rebels have indeed laid down their arms.

Terrorists and Traffickers in the Mountains

14. (SBU) Anacko suggested that, with the completion of the peace process, traffickers and even Al-Qaeda may maneuver to establish bases and occupy hideouts in mountains previously used by rebels in the North, "similar to what has occurred in Mali." He feared the

GON would not have the capability to root out these nefarious groups on its own and would need international support. He added, "these areas are ungoverned and difficult to travel. You should understand, this is the same situation as one finds in the mountains in Afghanistan."

Residents Returning to Agadez

15. (SBU) Anacko stated that people are able to travel to and within the urban parts of Agadez without problems, but that travel into the rural areas remains restricted due to landmines. He is hopeful the rural areas will open for travel in the coming months. He stressed, however, that he did not envision President Tandja lifting the State of Alert in the North in the near term; that there really isn't a reason to do so. In the meantime, security forces will continue to earn benefits to protect the area.

Comment

16. (SBU) Anacko's expressed sentiments about security in the north and the GON's need for assistance to combat nefarious, violent elements echo remarks the Prime Minister made in a meeting with the Ambassador (ref b) and suggests that the GON seeks mutual engagement on the matter with the USG. GON officials state that an AQIM presence has been entrenched in Niger for several months, make mention of public media reports about the USG support provided to Malian military and security forces, and have been on one accord in making pleas for USG assistance to its security services. End Comment.

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